

LOST MAN'S LANE.

A SECOND EPIISODE
IN THE LIFE OF AMELIA BUTTERWORTH
BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

CHAPTER XV.
A PARTING.

It was not till Mr. Trohm had driven away that I noticed in the shadow of the trees on the opposite side of the road a horse tied up, whose empty saddle spoke of a visitor within. At any other gate and on any other road this would not have struck me as worthy of notice, much less comment. But here and after all that I had heard during this eventful morning the circumstance was so unexpected I could not help feeling astonishment and showing it.

"A visitor?" I asked.
"Some one to see Lucetta."
William had no sooner said this than I saw he was in a state of high excitement. He had probably been in this condition when we drove up, but not having my attention directed to him I had not noticed it. Now, however, it was perfectly plain to me, and it did not seem quite the excitement of displeasure, though hardly that of joy.

"She doesn't expect you yet," he went on to remark as I turned sharply toward the house, "and if you interrupt her—D—n it, if I thought you would interrupt her!"
I thought it time to teach him a lesson in manners.

"Mr. Knollys," I interposed somewhat severely, "I am a lady. Why should I interrupt your sister or give her or you a moment of pain?"
"I don't know," he muttered. "You are so very quick I was afraid you might think it necessary to join her in the parlor. She is perfectly able to take care of herself, Miss Butterworth, and will do it. I'm afraid"—The rest was lost in indistinct guttural sounds.

I made no effort to answer this tirade. I took my usual course in quite my usual way to the front steps and went up them without so much as looking behind me to see whether or not this uncouth representative of the Knollys name had kept at his heels or not.

Entering the door, which was open, I came without any effort on my part upon Lucetta and—a young gentleman. They were standing together in the middle of the hall and were so absorbed in what they were saying that they neither saw nor heard me. I was therefore enabled to catch one or two sentences which struck me as of some moment. The first one was uttered by her and was very pleadingly said:

"A week—I only ask a week. Then I can give you an answer which perhaps will satisfy you."
His reply, in manner if not in matter, proclaimed him the lover of whom I had so lately heard.

"I cannot, dear girl; indeed I cannot. My whole future depends upon my making today that move in which I have asked you to join me. If I wait a week, my opportunity will be gone, Lucetta. You know me and you know how I love you. Thea come!"
A rude hand on my shoulder distracted my attention. William stood lowering behind me and as I turned whispered in my ear:

enough for me without this show on your part of your desire to get rid of me.
"There's woman's gratitude for you," was his growling reply. "I offer to take all her responsibilities on my own shoulders and make it right with—with her sister and all that, and she calls it desire to get rid of her. Well, have your own way," he cried out, storming down the hall; "I'm done with it for one."

The young man, whose attitude of reserve, mixed with a strange and lingering tenderness for this girl whom he evidently loved, without fully understanding her, was every minute winning more and more of my admiration, had meanwhile raised her trembling hand to his lips in what was, as we all could see, a last farewell.

In another moment he was walking by us, giving me as he passed a low bow that for all its grace did not succeed in hiding from me the deep and heartfelt disappointment with which he quitted this house. As his figure passed through the door, hiding for one moment the sunshine, I felt an oppression such as has not often visited my healthy nature, and when it passed and disappeared something like the good spirit of the place seemed to go with it, leaving behind doubt, gloom and a morbid apprehension of that something which had in Lucetta's eyes rendered his dismissal a necessity.

"Where's Saracen? I declare I'm nothing but a fool without that dog," shouted William. "If he has to be tied up another day!"—But even he has some sense of shame in his breast, for at Lucetta's reproachful "William!" he dropped his head sheepishly on his breast and strode out, muttering some words I was fain to accept as an apology.

I had expected to encounter a wreck in Lucetta. As this episode in her life closed she turned toward me. But I did not yet know this girl whose frailty seemed to lie mostly in her physique. Though she was suffering far more than her defense of me to her brother would seem to denote, there was a spirit in her approach and a steady look in her dark eyes which assured me that I could not calculate upon any loss in Lucetta's keenness in case we came to an issue over the mystery that was eating into the happiness as well as the honor of this household. And this in a measure was gratifying to me. I should have to take advantage of her despair to discover a secret she would have been able to keep in her better moments.

"I am glad to see you," were her unexpected words. "The gentleman who has just gone out was a lover of mine; at least he once professed to care for me very much, and I should have been glad to have married him, but there were reasons which I once thought were very good why this seemed anything but expedient, and so I sent him away. Today he came without warning to ask me to go away with him now, after the happiest of ceremonies, to South America, where a splendid prospect has suddenly opened for him. You see, don't you, that I could not do that; that it would be the height of selfishness in me to leave Loren—leave William!"

"Who seems only too anxious to be left," I put in as her voice trailed off in the first evidence of embarrassment she had shown since she first faced me.
"William is a difficult man to understand," was her firm but quiet retort. "From his talk you would judge him to be morose if not positively unkind, but in action—She did not tell me how he was in action. Perhaps her truthfulness got the better of her, or perhaps she saw it would be hard work to prejudice me now in his favor."

CHAPTER XVI.
LOREEN.
In a week, Lucetta had said, she might have been able, had he been willing or in a position to wait, to give him a more satisfactory answer. Why in a week? That she shrank from leaving her sister so suddenly or that she had sacrificed her life's happiness to any childish idea of decorum I did not think probable even. The spirit she had shown, her immovable attitude under a temptation which had not only romance to recommend it, but everything else which could affect a young and sensitive woman, argued in my mind the existence of some uncompleted duty of so exacting and imperative a nature that she could not even consider the greatest interests of her own life until this one thing was out of her way. William's rude question of the morning, "What shall we do with the old girl till it is all over?" returned to me in support of this theory, making me feel that I needed no more confirmation to be quite certain that a crisis was approaching in this house which would tax my powers to the utmost and call perhaps for the use of the whistle which I had received from Mr. Gryce, and which, following his instructions, I had tied carefully about my neck. Yet how could I associate Lucetta with crime or dream of the police in connection with the serene Loren, whose every look was a rebuke to all that was false, vile or even common? Easily, my readers, easily, with that great, hulking William in my remembrance. To shield him, to hide perhaps his deformity of soul from the world, even such gentle and gracious women as these have been known to enter into acts which to any unprejudiced eye and an unbiased conscience would seem little short of fiendish.

Love for an unworthy relative or rather the sense of duty toward one's own has driven many a clear minded woman to her ruin, as the police annals, embodied as they are for me in Mr. Gryce, would show.
That I have not as yet put into definite words the suspicion upon which I was now prepared to work is quite apparent to me. Up to this time it had been too vague, or rather of so monstrous a character, that I had felt ready to consider other possibilities, as, for instance, the possible connection of old Mother Jane with the unaccountable disappearances which had taken place in this lane. But now the very definite assurances I had been constantly receiving from the moment I had set foot in this house that something extraordinary and out of keeping with the ordinary appearances of the household was going on in secret in some one of the innumerable chambers of that long corridor corresponding to my own, and which for very obvious reasons I had as yet failed to find any excuse for penetrating, was taking shape in my mind, and I no longer affected to deny to myself that everything I had thus far seen and heard went toward establishing the fact that these young women held in charge a prisoner of some kind of whose presence there and personality they dreaded the discovery.

Now, who could this prisoner be? Common sense supplied me with but one answer—Silly Rufus, the boy who within a few days had vanished from among the good people of this seemingly guileless community.
Once settled in this idea, I applied myself to a consideration of the means at my disposal for determining its truth. The simplest and perhaps the most sure as well as the least satisfactory to one of my nature would be to summon the police and have the house thoroughly searched, but this involved, in case I had been deceived by appearances—as was possible even to a woman of my ex-

perience and discrimination—a scandal and an opprobrium which I would be the last to inflict upon Althea's children unless justice to the rest of the world demanded it.
It was in consideration of this very fact, perhaps, that I had been placed here instead of some regular police spy. Mr. Gryce is a man who has made it his rule of life never to risk the reputation of any man or woman without reasons so excellent as to bear their own exonerations with them, and should I, a woman, with fall as much heart if not quite so much brain (at least in the estimation of people in general), by any premature exposure of my suspicions cast a mantle of shame over this family they are far too weak and too poor to ever rise above again?

No, rather would I trust a little longer to my own perspicacity and make sure by the use of my own eyes and ears that the situation called for the interference I had, as you may say, at the end of the cord I was even now fingering.
Lucetta had not asked me how I came to be back so much sooner than she had reason to expect me. The unexpected arrival of her lover had probably put all idea of her former plans out of her head. I therefore attempted no explanation with her and a very short one with Loren when I met her at the dinner table. Nothing further seemed to be necessary, for the girls were even more abstracted than ever before, and William positively boorish till a warning glance from Loren recalled him somewhat to his better self, which meant silence.

The afternoon was spent in very much the same way as the evening before. Neither sister remained an instant with me after the other entered my company, and though the alternations were less frequent than they had been at that time their peculiarities were more marked and less naturally accounted for. It was while Loren was with me that I made the suggestion which had been hovering on my lips ever since the noon.

"I think this," said I in one of the pauses of our more than fitful conversation, "one of the most interesting houses it has ever been my good fortune to enter. Would you mind my roaming about it a bit just to enjoy the old time flavor of its great empty rooms? I know they are mostly closed and possibly unfurnished, but to a connoisseur like myself in colonial architecture this would rather add to their interest than detract from it."

"Impossible," she was going to say, but caught herself back in time and changed the imperative word to one more conciliatory if equally unyielding.
"I am sorry, Miss Butterworth, to deny you this gratification, but the condition of the rooms and the unhappy excitement into which we have been thrown by the unfortunate visit paid to Lucetta by a gentleman she is only too much attached to—I hope you will not expect me to talk on the subject—make it quite impossible for me to consider any such undertaking today. Tomorrow I may find it easier; but, if not, be assured you shall see every nook and corner in it if you so desire before you leave the house."

"Thank you," I retorted dryly. "I will remember that. To one of my tastes an ancient room in a time honored mansion like this affords a delight not to be understood by one who knows less of a century ago's life. The legends only connected with your great drawing room below (we were sitting in my room, I having refused to be cooped up in their dreary side parlor and she not having offered me any other spot more cheerful) are attractions sufficient to hold me entranced for an hour. I heard one of them today."
"Which?"

She spoke more quickly than usual and for her quite sharply.
"Mrs. Carter," I went on, "endeavored to amuse me by relating the story of Lucetta's namesake—she who rode through the night after a daughter who had won her lover's heart away from her."
"Ah, it is a well known tale, but I think Mrs. Carter might have left us to tell it to you. Did she relate anything else?"
"No other tradition of this place," said I.
"I am glad she was so considerate. But why—if you will pardon me—did she happen to light upon that? We have

able to those who live in the lane. It ought to have turned in here. Were you fortunate enough to have been awake at that moment and to have seen this spectral appearance?"
She shuddered. I was not mistaken in believing I saw this sign of emotion, for I was looking at her very closely, and the movement was unmistakable.
"I have never seen anything ghostly in my life," said she. "I am not at all superstitious."
If I had been ill natured or if I had thought it wise to press her too closely, I might have said:
"Then why do you look so pale? Why tremble so visibly, you whom I have never before seen disturbed?"
But my natural kindness, together with an instinct of caution, restrained me, and I only remarked:
"There you are sensible, Miss Knollys—doubtless so as a denizen of this house, which Mrs. Carter was obliging enough to suggest to me was considered by many as haunted."

The straightening of Miss Knollys' lips argued no good to Mrs. Carter.
"Now I only wish it was," I laughed dryly. "I should really like to meet a ghost, say, in your great drawing room, which I am forbidden to enter."
"You are not forbidden," she uttered hastily. "You may explore it now if you will excuse me from accompanying you, but you will meet no ghosts. The hour is not propitious."
Taken aback by her sudden amenity, I hesitated for a moment. Would it be worth while for me to search a room she was willing to have me enter? No, and yet any knowledge which could be obtained in regard to this house might be of use to me or to Mr. Gryce. I decided to embrace her offer, but first I must test her with one other question.
"Would you prefer," said I, "that I should steal down these corridors at night and dare its dusky recesses at a time when specters are supposed to walk the halls they once flitted through in happy consciousness?"

"Hardly." She made the greatest effort to sustain the jest, but her concern and dread were manifest. "I think I had better give you the keys now than subject you to the drafts and chilling discomforts of this old place at midnight."
I rose with a semblance of eager anticipation.
"I will take you at your word," said I. "The keys, my dear. I am going to visit a haunted room for the first time in my life."
I do not think she was deceived by this feigned ebullition. Perhaps it was too much out of keeping with my ordinary manner, but she gave no sign of surprise and rose in her turn with an air suggestive of relief.

"Excuse me," said she, "if I precede you. I will meet you at the head of the corridor with the keys."
I was in hopes she would be long enough in obtaining them to allow me to stroll along the front hall to the opening into the farther corridor, in which I felt a special interest. But the spryness I showed seemed to have a corresponding effect upon her, for she almost flew down the passage before me and was back at my side before I could take a step in the coveted direction.
"These will take you into any room on the first floor," said she. "You will meet with dust and Lucetta's abhorrence, spiders, but for these I shall make no apologies. Girls who cannot provide comforts for the few rooms they utilize cannot be expected to keep in order the large and disused apartments of a former generation."
"I hate dirt and despise spiders, but I am willing to brave both," I assured her, "for the pleasure of satisfying my love for the antique." At which she handed me the keys, with a calm smile which was not without its element of sadness.

"I will be here on your return," she murmured, leaning over the banisters to speak to me as I took my first steps down. "I shall want to hear whether you are repaid for your trouble."
I thanked her and proceeded on my way, somewhat doubtful whether by so doing I was making or not the best use possible of my opportunities.
(To be Continued Next Week.)

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